

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

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FOLLOWING REPEAT MEXICO 0147 ACTION SECSTATE 07 JAN

QUOTE

UNCLAS MEXICO 0147

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TAGS: SNAR MX

SUBJECT: EXCELSIOR COLUMNIST RAISES DOUBTS ABOUT HERBICIDES

REF MEXICO 65

1. FOLLOWING IS EMBASSY TRANSLATION OF TEXT OF EXCELSIOR
COLUMN DATED JAN. 7 CHALLENGING GOM TO LEVEL WITH PUBLIC
ABOUT USE OF HERBICIDES AGAINST POPPY PLANTINGS. BEGIN TEXT:
DEFOLIATION OVER OUR TERRITORY: INADMISSIBLE TESTS BY GUILLERMO
JORDAN

IT IS A BRIEF AND STRANGE HISTORY; WITH THE KNOWN PIECES
IN PLACE, HOLES STILL APPEAR AND SOMETHING LOOKS WRONG, TOO
WRONG. IN HIS FIRST STATEMENT OF THE YEAR, THE SECRETARY OF
NATIONAL DEFENSE, GENERAL HERMENEGILDO CUENCA DIAZ, CONCEDED
THAT THE ARMY USES HERBICIDES ON POPPY AND MARIJUANA PLANTINGS.

"TESTS ARE NOW BEING CARRIED OUT, PRINCIPALLY IN GUERRERO
AND SINALOA", SECRETARY CUENCA INDICATED. "THEY HAVE TO DO
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WITH SUBSTANCES WHICH BURN THE POPPY AND THE MARIJUANA. BUT

I BELIEVE THAT THEY COULD DAMAGE (OTHER) PLANTS, WE DON'T KNOW YET TO WHAT EXTENT.. NEVERTHELESS, THAT'S FOR THE EXPERTS TO DECIDE."

HE WAS ASKED WHETHER THE USE OF CHEMICALS IN THE "PLAN CAN-ADOR" IS THE RESULT OF PRESSURES BY THE UNITED STATES; GENERAL CUENCA DIAZ RESPONDED CAUTIOUSLY: "NO, NO, NOT THAT I KNOW OF, BUT THE PERSON WHO CAN ENLIGHTEN YOU ABOUT THAT IS THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC ..."

ACCORDING TO THE SECRETARY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, THE USE OF HERBICIDES ON MEXICAN TERRITORY IS "AT THE EXPERIMENTAL STAGE." AND THEY ARE BEING APPLIED "OVER SMALL AREAS."

ON THE 12TH OF NOVEMBER OF LAST YEAR, IN THE UNITED STATES, REPRESENTATIVE CHARLES B. RANGEL, DEMOCRAT OF NEW YORK, PROPOSED THE USE OF "HERBICIDES OR PULBERIZED CHEMICAL PRODUCTS -- SIMILAR TO THOSE USED IN VIETNAM BY THE US AIR FORCE -- TO DESTROY THE POPPY PLANTINGS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTHWEST MEXICO."

RANGEL, A NEW YORKER, PROPOSED "THAT PRESIDENT FORD IMMEDIATELY SCHEDULE A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT LUIS ECHEVERRIA TO AGREE UPON A JOINT PROGRAM," FOR THE PURPOSE OF STREWING PART OF OUR COUNTRY WITH MATERIALS WHICH DESTROY THE VEGETATION AND WHICH STERILIZE THE EARTH.

WITH YANKEE SUBTLETY, RANGEL STATED: "I BELEIVE WE SHOULD INCREASE OUR PRESSURE ON MEXICO SO THAT ...IT WILL TAKE MORE EFFECTIVE MEASURES..."

THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE CAME FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC, PEDRO OJEDA PAULLADA, WHO DECLARED FIRMLY THAT "MEXICO WILL NOT USE CHEMICALS WHICH MIGHT DAMAGE ITS ECOLOGY." OUR COUNTRY, THE ATTORNEY GENERAL EXPLAINED, "WILL NEVER ALLOW ITSELF TO BE USED AS A PROVING GROUND FOR THOSE SUBSTANCES WHICH COULD DAMAGE THE ECOLOGY.." WITH RESPECT TO THE STATEMENTS OF REPRESENTATIVE RANGEL:
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"PERHAPS THEY WERE THE RESULT OF THE STRONG IMPACT UPON HIM OF THE TRIP WE TOOK THROUGH THE MOUNTAINOUS REGION IN THE NORTHWEST OF THE COUNTRY, AN EXTREMELY CRITICAL ZONE WITH RESPECT TO POPPY CULTIVATION."

THE WORDS OF OJEDA PAULLADA REASSURED US: UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD MEXICO EMPLOY SUCH DANGEROUS CHEMICALS. CONGRESSMAN RANGEL LACKS THE STRENGTH TO PRESSURE (US).

OJEDA PAULLADA TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO ANNOUNCE THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST POPPY AND MARIJUANA CULTIVATION, BY TRADITIONAL METHODS, WHICH BEGAN ON NOVEMBER 15 AND WILL LAST UNTIL MARCH 15, 1976.

PERHAPS A PART OF THIS CAMPAIGN IS THE "PLAN CAN-ADOR", IN WHICH THE TECHNOLOGY TESTED IN VIETNAM IS TO BE APPLIED "EXPERIMENTALLY AND OVER SMALL SURFACES."

THERE ARE REASONS TO SUSPECT AS MUCH, IN SPITE OF THE STRONG RESPONSE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL OJEDA. IN WASHINGTON ON NOVEMBER 14, ATTORNEY GENERAL EDWARD H. LEVY "PRAISED THE GOVERNMENT OF MEXICO FOR ITS WILLINGNESS TO USE THE MOST ADVANCED TECHNIQUES TO DESTROY THE POPPY PLANTINGS" IN A CLEAR ALLUSION TO THE HERBICIDES.

EARLIER, ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, A SPOKESMAN FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE IN WASHINGTON DENIED THE REPORTS OF PRESSURES BUT TOLD EXCELSIOR CORRESPONDENT ARMANDO BARGAS: "I UNDERSTAND THAT PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA WAS TO HAVE ANNOUNCED A NEW PROGRAM FOR COMBATTING HEROIN TODAY. DO YOU KNOW WHETHER HE MADE THE ANNOUNCEMENT?" AT THIS POINT INFORMATION WAS SUSPENDED; THEN ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, WHEN CUENCA DIAZ REVEALED THE USE OF CHEMICALS AT "THE EXPERIMENTAL STAGE", WE RECEIVED NEW AND ALARMING WORD.

THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE, OSCAR BRAUER HERRERA, WARNED OF THE RISKS THAT THE COUNTRY WAS RUNNING AND RECALLED "THE USE OF HERBICIDES IN VIETNAM TO DEFOLIATE TREES AND KILL PEOPLE."

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ALEJANDRO GERTZ MANERO, OFFICIAL MAYOR OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE AND COORDINATOR OF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS, RECALLED LAST NOVEMBER 27 THAT: "WE ARE MERELY VICTIMS OF A SITUATION IN WHICH WE ACT AS AN UNDER-DEVELOPED COUNTRY. WE CREATE THE CRIMINAL RAW MATERIAL FOR THE ENRICHMENT OF HIGHLY DEVELOPED COUNTRIES." HE EXPLAINED THAT OF THE TOTAL FOREIGN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS JAILED IN MEXICO, 80 PERCENT ARE FROM THE UNITED STATES, SINCE OUR NEIGHBORING COUNTRY IS THE GREAT CONSUMERS MARKET CONTROLLED BY GANGSTERS LIVING IN CHICAGO AND NEW YORK.

STILL UNKNOWN IS WHO GAVE THE ORDER TO EXPERIMENT WITH CHEMICAL HERBICIDES. THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE HIMSELF SAYS "I BELIEVE THIS COULD DAMAGE THE FLORA";

WITH RESPECT TO US PRESSURES ON MEXICO, GENERAL CUENCA
INDICATES: " THE PERSON WHO CAN ENLIGHTEN YOU ABOUT THAT IS
THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC." LET'S HOPE, THEN,
THAT SOMEONE ENLIGHTENS US.
END TEXT.
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